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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000033

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SUBJECT: BASRAH NDI HOSTS ADVOCACY TRAINING FOR POLITICAL MODERATES

REF: 05 BASRAH 157

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, Deputy REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO
BASRAH, DEPARTMENT OF STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 7 and 8, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Basrah hosted a training session on political advocacy, targeting women in Basrah who are actively engaged in politics, non-governmental organizations, and journalism. The goal of the training was to increase participants' skills in winning support for their platform's issues. This particular training session was specifically designed for supporters of the moderate 731 List parties, and it addressed key weaknesses in 731's campaign. End Summary.

NDI Advocacy Training

¶2. (C) On March 7 and 8, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Basrah hosted a training session on political advocacy. Five Iraqi women representing two of the parties on the 731 List, the Iraqi National Accord (INA) and the Arab Socialist Movement, attended the training. Basrah IPAO observed a morning training session, conducted by the Basrah-based NDI program manager, a Baghdad-based women's participation expert, and an NDI translator. The goal of the training was to develop the skills of the participants to influence local government officials to pass legislation in support of their party's interests. Issues covered during the training included identifying allies, targeting undecided voters, and developing reachable goals and targets.

¶3. (C) The small size of the training sessions allowed NDI staff to engage with the participants one-on-one. The relaxed, low-key setting of the training encouraged the Iraqi women participants to actively contribute to the training by asking questions, voicing their opinions, and submitting suggestions for ways to win support for their parties. The trainers used an example of trying to get the Basrah Provincial Council (BPC) to increase funding for hospitals in Basrah. The participants identified patients, families of patients, doctors, and their political parties as allies. They stated a target of influencing the BPC to allocate an additional \$50,000 for the hospital. In order to win over the rest of the BPC, participants suggested making a video of the poor conditions at the hospital and showing it on the news and then conducting a letter writing campaign in the neighborhoods of influential BPC members.

¶4. (C) During the training, NDI staff specifically addressed

the ineffectiveness of holding rallies and demonstrations in support of a cause. Rallies are not secure and people get hurt during them. Rallies and demonstrations also leave no record, whereas letters and petitions are written documents that serve as the testimony of actual voters. NDI staff also stressed that 90 percent of a party's time and resources should be spent on targeting undecided voters. Once identified, it is important to turn the party's efforts away from allies and concentrate on voters and legislators who have not yet made up their minds. (Comment: NDI staff later told IPA0 that the issue of targeting undecided voters was one of the most significant weaknesses of the 731 campaign strategy. Party members felt most comfortable spending time with their supporters and showed reluctance to engage with their opponents. End comment)

15. (C) One of the participants told IPA0 that she was attending the training because she was frustrated with the BPC. "The BPC is very wealthy, " she said, "but it doesn't spend its money well." She said that she had developed a database, thanks to NDI training, on all the BPC members. This database included all sorts of personal information on the member, including number of children and where they were born, as well as their positions on key issues. She said that she had information on 24 of the 41 BPC members.

Background on NDI Basrah

16. (C) The Basrah branch of NDI started in 2003 and began program work in 2004. The NDI center in Basrah has two permanent expatriate staff members, about 10 Iraqi staff, and hosts NDI staff from Baghdad on a rotational basis. It has three conference rooms and a computer training room with nine terminals where it conducts training on computer skills with an emphasis on developing Excel databases. The main entrance hall serves as a resource room, where representatives from political parties and NGOs can enter freely in order to collect brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, and other literature.

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NDI and REO Cooperation

17. (C) In a follow-up meeting, REO and NDI staff discussed ways to increase cooperation. NDI expressed willingness to display and distribute REO materials, such as Hi Magazines and Democracy Papers packages, in their resource room. Doing this would aid the REO considerably in the distribution of public affairs materials, since travel outside the compound has become increasingly difficult for REO staff. REO staff and NDI discussed holding a joint conference in the NDI facilities for Basrah university student leaders, a group that is interested in politics and is at risk for recruitment by violent extremist groups in Basrah.

18. (C) Comment: The 731 List won only two seats from Basrah province in the December 15 parliamentary election, fewer than the INA party had hoped. The NDI advocacy training directly addressed 731's need to learn to identify allies and opponents, and to develop strategies to influence undecided voters and politicians (see reftel). While NDI also provides advocacy training to other political parties, including 731's opponents, this training helped level the political playing field by ensuring that Basrah's political moderates have access to resources and training on how to conduct strategic political planning. End Comment.

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